

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
EASTERN DISTRICT OF WISCONSIN

JEREMIAH N. KINIKIN,

Plaintiff,

v.

Case No. 24-CV-623-JPS

MICHAEL E. FERGUSON,

Defendant.

ORDER

Plaintiff Jeremiah N. Kinikin, an inmate confined at Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility, filed a pro se complaint under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 alleging that the Defendant violated his constitutional rights to adequate nutrition. ECF No. 1. This Order resolves Plaintiff's motion for leave to proceed without prepaying the filing fee and screens his complaint.

1. MOTION FOR LEAVE TO PROCEED WITHOUT PREPAYING THE FILING FEE

The Prison Litigation Reform Act ("PLRA") applies to this case because Plaintiff was a prisoner when he filed his complaint. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(h). The PLRA allows the Court to give a prisoner plaintiff the ability to proceed with his case without prepaying the civil case filing fee. *Id.* § 1915(a)(2). When funds exist, the prisoner must pay an initial partial filing fee. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(1). He must then pay the balance of the \$350 filing fee over time, through deductions from his prisoner account. *Id.*

On June 5, 2024, the Court ordered Plaintiff to pay an initial partial filing fee of \$44.61. ECF No. 5. Plaintiff paid that fee on July 8, 2024. The Court will grant Plaintiff's motion for leave to proceed without prepaying

the filing fee. ECF No. 2. He must pay the remainder of the filing fee over time in the manner explained at the end of this Order.

2. SCREENING THE COMPLAINT

2.1 Federal Screening Standard

Under the PLRA, the Court must screen complaints brought by prisoners seeking relief from a governmental entity or an officer or employee of a governmental entity. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(a). The Court must dismiss a complaint if the prisoner raises claims that are legally “frivolous or malicious,” that fail to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or that seek monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. 28 U.S.C. § 1915A(b).

In determining whether the complaint states a claim, the Court applies the same standard that applies to dismissals under Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 12(b)(6). *See Cesal v. Moats*, 851 F.3d 714, 720 (7th Cir. 2017) (citing *Booker-El v. Superintendent, Ind. State Prison*, 668 F.3d 896, 899 (7th Cir. 2012)). A complaint must include “a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief.” Fed. R. Civ. P. 8(a)(2). The complaint must contain enough facts, accepted as true, to “state a claim for relief that is plausible on its face.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (quoting *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 570 (2007)). “A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows a court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged.” *Id.* (citing *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 556).

To state a claim for relief under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, a plaintiff must allege that someone deprived him of a right secured by the Constitution or the laws of the United States and that whoever deprived him of this right was acting under the color of state law. *D.S. v. E. Porter Cnty. Sch. Corp.*, 799

F.3d 793, 798 (7th Cir. 2015) (citing *Buchanan-Moore v. County of Milwaukee*, 570 F.3d 824, 827 (7th Cir. 2009)). The Court construes pro se complaints liberally and holds them to a less stringent standard than pleadings drafted by lawyers. *Cesal*, 851 F.3d at 720 (citing *Perez v. Fenoglio*, 792 F.3d 768, 776 (7th Cir. 2015)).

2.2 Plaintiff's Allegations

Plaintiff brings this action against Defendant Michael E. Ferguson. ECF No. 1 at 1. On March 28, 2024, Plaintiff was given breakfast from 6:45-7:00 a.m. and lunch from 11:17-11:34 a.m. *Id.* at 2. On April 1, 2024, Plaintiff was given breakfast from 6:45-7:00 a.m. and lunch from 11:21-11:36 a.m. *Id.* The Department of Corrections rulebook says staff “must allow up to 20 minutes to eat.” *Id.* at 3. During each of these four meals, Plaintiff was still eating when Defendant ordered him to “lock-in.” *Id.* at 2. Plaintiff, knowing that he was not allowed open food in his cell, was forced to dispose of his remaining uneaten food. *Id.* Plaintiff tried to discuss the situation with Defendant on at least two occasions. *Id.* at 2-3. On one occasion Plaintiff asked for a supervisor and Defendant replied that “[Plaintiff] wasn’t going to win this one.” *Id.* at 3. On another, Defendant told Plaintiff to bring the remaining food back to Plaintiff’s cell, an instruction in violation of the DOC rule against open food in cells. *Id.* Plaintiff believes that “[Defendant] refused to accommodate [Plaintiff’s] nutritional needs” and that “[t]his is ‘cruel and unusual punishment’ as defined by the 8th amendment and fully intentional rather than a ‘harmless error.’” *Id.*

2.3 Analysis

The Court finds that Plaintiff may not proceed on an Eighth Amendment conditions of confinement claim. A prisoner’s claim of unconstitutional conditions of confinement is analyzed under the Eighth

Amendment's cruel and unusual punishment clause. *See Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 832, 834 (1994). A prisoner is entitled to live in conditions that do not amount to "punishment." *Bell v. Wolfish*, 441 U.S. 520, 535 (1979). Detainees are entitled to be confined under humane conditions that provide for their "basic human needs." *Rhodes v. Chapman*, 452 U.S. 337, 347 (1981). "The Constitution does not mandate comfortable prisons, but neither does it permit inhumane ones[.]" *Snipes v. DeTella*, 95 F.3d 586, 590 (7th Cir. 1996).

To establish a constitutional violation with respect to an inmate's living conditions, he must be able to demonstrate both: (1) the conditions were objectively so adverse that they deprived him "of the minimal civilized measure of life's necessities," and (2) the defendants acted with deliberate indifference with respect to the conditions. *Townsend v. Fuchs*, 522 F.3d 765, 773 (7th Cir. 2008) (quoting *Farmer*, 511 U.S. at 834). "Life's necessities include shelter, heat, clothing, sanitation, and hygiene items." *Woods v. Schmeltz*, No. 14-CV-1336, 2014 WL 7005094, at *1 (C.D. Ill. Dec. 11, 2014) (citing *Gillis v. Litscher*, 468 F.3d 488, 493 (7th Cir. 2006)); *see also Budd v. Motley*, 711 F.3d 840, 842–43 (7th Cir. 2013). Depending on the "amount and duration of the deprivation," denying a prisoner adequate nutrition can violate the prisoner's Eighth Amendment rights. *Reed v. McBride*, 178 F.3d 849, 853 (7th Cir. 1999). Courts have found that instances of more "minor" deprivations did not meet the "objective seriousness" prong. *See Dickerson v. Milwaukee Cnty.*, No. 23-CV-1442-BHL, 2024 WL 233376 (E.D. Wis. Jan. 22, 2024) (holding that two consecutive missed meals did not "rise to the level of a constitutional violation"); *Stevens v. Carr*, No. 20-C-1735, 2021 WL 39542 (E.D. Wis. Jan. 5, 2021) (holding that "a slice of meat, bread, and a handful of chips at meal time, along with two peanut butter and two jelly squeeze packs with four pieces of bread at breakfast" was not

inadequate even if the plaintiff wanted more to eat); *see also Freeman v. Berge*, 441 F.3d 543 (7th Cir. 2006) (holding that withholding sporadic meals over two and a half years due to the inmate's refusal to follow health and safety policy conditions to receiving meals was not a cruel and unusual punishment because it was both self-inflicted and there is no evidence of "real suffering, extreme discomfort, or any lasting detrimental health consequences").

Here, Plaintiff's complaint alleges that he was deprived the opportunity to finish his entire meals for a short period of time (four meals over two days). The instances alleged, however, seem not to be a total deprivation because the Plaintiff alleges that at least fifteen minutes was allowed for a mealtime in each occurrence. Presumably, the Plaintiff was allowed to eat at least some food during this period. Further, there is no allegation that the food consumed was calorically insufficient or otherwise nutritiously inadequate. Although Plaintiff takes issue with Defendant violating certain prison policies, a "violation of a prison policy alone does not violate the Constitution. . . ." *Schroeder v. Sawall*, 747 F. App'x 429, 431 (7th Cir. 2019) (citing *Lewis v. Richards*, 107 F.3d 549, 553 n. 5 (7th Cir. 1997); *Langston v. Peters*, 100 F.3d 1235, 1238 (7th Cir. 1996)). As such, the Court does not find that Plaintiff's complaint contains sufficient facts to state an Eighth Amendment conditions and confinement claim.

The Court will allow Plaintiff an opportunity to amend his complaint on or before **September 18, 2024** to expound upon his allegations against Defendant. If he chooses to offer an amended complaint, Plaintiff should provide the Court with enough facts to answer the following questions: (1) What was the amount of food that was deprived because of Defendant's actions; and (2) What specific effects did Defendant's actions have on

Plaintiff's health and wellbeing? Plaintiff's amended complaint does not need to be long or contain legal language or citations to statutes or cases, but it does need to provide the Court and each defendant with notice of what each defendant allegedly did or did not do to violate his rights.

The Court is enclosing a copy of its amended complaint form and instructions. Plaintiff must list all of the defendants in the caption of his amended complaint. He should use the spaces on pages two and three to allege the key facts that give rise to the claims he wishes to bring, and to describe which defendants he believes committed the violations that relate to each claim. If the space is not enough, Plaintiff may use up to five additional sheets of paper.

Plaintiff is advised that the amended complaint must bear the docket number assigned to this case and must be labeled "Amended Complaint." The amended complaint supersedes the prior complaint and must be complete in itself without reference to the original complaint. *See Duda v. Bd. of Educ. of Franklin Park Pub. Sch. Dist. No. 84*, 133 F.3d 1054, 1056 (7th Cir. 1998). In *Duda*, the appellate court emphasized that in such instances, the "prior pleading is in effect withdrawn as to all matters not restated in the amended pleading." *Id.* at 1057 (citation omitted). If an amended complaint is received, it will become the operative complaint in this action, and the Court will screen it in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 1915A.

3. CONCLUSION

Accordingly,

IT IS ORDERED that Plaintiff's motion for leave to proceed without prepaying the filing fee, ECF No. 2, be and the same is hereby **GRANTED**;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the complaint fails to state a claim;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that Plaintiff may file an amended complaint that complies with the instructions in this Order on or before **September 18, 2024**. If Plaintiff files an amended complaint by the deadline, the Court will screen the amended complaint under 28 U.S.C. § 1915A. If Plaintiff does not file an amended complaint by the deadline, the Court will dismiss this case based on his failure to state a claim in his original complaint and will issue him a “strike” under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g);

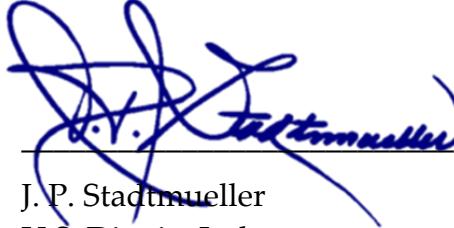
IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the Clerk’s Office mail Plaintiff a blank prisoner amended complaint form and a copy of the guides entitled “Answers to Prisoner Litigants’ Common Questions” and “Answers to Pro Se Litigants’ Common Questions,” along with this Order;

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that the agency having custody of Plaintiff shall collect from his institution trust account the \$305.39 balance of the filing fee by collecting monthly payments from Plaintiff’s prison trust account in an amount equal to 20% of the preceding month’s income credited to Plaintiff’s trust account and forwarding payments to the Clerk of Court each time the amount in the account exceeds \$10 in accordance with 28 U.S.C. § 1915(b)(2). The payments shall be clearly identified by the case name and number assigned to this case. If Plaintiff is transferred to another county, state, or federal institution, the transferring institution shall forward a copy of this Order along with his remaining balance to the receiving institution; and

IT IS FURTHER ORDERED that a copy of this Order be sent to the officer in charge of the agency where Plaintiff is confined.

Dated at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this 27th day of August, 2024.

BY THE COURT:



J. P. Stadtmueller
U.S. District Judge

Plaintiffs who are inmates at Prisoner E-Filing Program institutions shall submit all correspondence and case filings to institution staff, who will scan and e-mail documents to the Court. Prisoner E-Filing is mandatory for all inmates at Columbia Correctional Institution, Dodge Correctional Institution, Green Bay Correctional Institution, Oshkosh Correctional Institution, Waupun Correctional Institution, and Wisconsin Secure Program Facility.

Plaintiffs who are inmates at all other prison facilities, or who have been released from custody, will be required to submit all correspondence and legal material to:

Office of the Clerk
United States District Court
Eastern District of Wisconsin
362 United States Courthouse
517 E. Wisconsin Avenue
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202

DO NOT MAIL ANYTHING DIRECTLY TO THE COURT'S CHAMBERS. If mail is received directly to the Court's chambers, **IT WILL BE RETURNED TO SENDER AND WILL NOT BE FILED IN THE CASE.**

Plaintiff is further advised that failure to timely file any brief, motion, response, or reply may result in the dismissal of this action for failure to prosecute. In addition, the parties must notify the Clerk of Court of any change of address. **IF PLAINTIFF FAILS TO PROVIDE AN UPDATED ADDRESS TO THE COURT AND MAIL IS RETURNED TO THE COURT AS UNDELIVERABLE, THE COURT WILL DISMISS THIS ACTION WITHOUT PREJUDICE.**